

Diane Mantzaris - Fountain of Eve

The digital image titled 'Fountain of Eve' is the latest of Diane Mantzaris' artwork, referencing Greek classicism and theatricality, depicting a half-realistic, half-marble sculpture of a woman urinating. The work will be exhibited on canvas, paper and potentially a sculpture or public fountain she said. Mantzaris, whose art practice is multidisciplinary and spans several decades, says she is pleased that the work appears to be located somewhere between a waxwork, a photograph and a painting.

Like many artists, Mantzaris frequently utilizes Facebook as a vehicle to showcase and garner opinion of work in progress and new works. In recent times Mantzaris showcased 'Fountain of Eve' to her personal acquaintances in just that manner, only to find the heat positively rising. Minutes after making her work available for perusal, Mantzaris was contacted by another demanding that her image be removed. Much to Mantzaris' surprise, the complainant was a prominent member of the Australian Arts community who, to her even greater surprise, placed a formal complaint to Facebook, resulting in the image being removed by Facebook.

Many came to the artists defence. One celebrated Australian artist suggests that the actual reason for the outrage might be found in the urinating being undertaken by a metaphorical woman. "There's a deeply entrenched puritanical streak in Australian culture, which seems to be focused against women making bold statements in art. If the boys do it, that's just fine." This event shows just how fragile our expectation of freedom of artistic expression really is.

Mantzaris' view was that the work would be of interest to members of the arts community and a few long standing acquaintances, and so took to notifying those whom she assumed to have an interest in what artists do and to the work as it was progressing. The work, according to Mantzaris, is proposed with noble intent, clarifying at the same time that it bears no semblance to reality, is outside the realm of the pornographic and not in any way exploitative. It is clearly not an image of reality, which makes the claims of offence mystifying. The work is a self-portrait but where reality stops and fiction begins is something, Mantzaris grants, is difficult to distinguish by virtue of the treatment in her work, and that has also been afforded here.

The idea of urinating was initially floated as a symbolic gesture of protesting issues that mattered to Mantzaris, first and foremost censorship in art. Mantzaris states: 'The symbolism of the apples in relation to the metaphor of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was not lost on me. I am aware of the fetishization and hidden

curiosity pertaining to pissing, and a dearth of pissing female fountains. I wanted to make one.”

Perhaps it is a sign of an increasingly moralistic climate in Australia where a rating system of content in art is in the process of being given serious consideration by the Australia Council. Where such a rating system might place Australia in terms of an egalitarian location to create art remains anyone’s guess, as is the question of where such a system would position major European and American works, the like of Picasso’s paintings of urinating women or Gilbert & Georges so-called ‘Naked Shit Pictures’, to give an example of just two artists that gallery visitors the world over are free to consume.

There is quiet frustration inherent in Mantzaris’ view that art organisations, institutions and government-run galleries do seemingly little to negotiate the political aspect of artistic freedom, and in her view, it would be a travesty if the Australian cultural landscape were to become one where a solitary person can demand the censorship of an artwork, and succeed to such end.

The final words pertaining to Mantzaris’ work might rest with a Melbourne artist, contributing to Mantzaris’ Facebook page, welcoming the image as an important contribution to Australian art: “I think the idea of your work being Eve is fundamental to my excitement of it. The two apples infinitely excite me. The apple is a sign of the transgression, of a metaphorical breaking of the law, of doing something that isn't meant to be done. "Don't like it? Well, watch this" as she goes back for another. I really love it. I am a massive fan of this. This work will enter the world of its own accord and do so very well with an inordinate amount of potency, it would be a massive shame if it were to end up in the hands of a private collector and really needs to be public.”

Nota Bene:

Mantzaris is currently attempting to garner support towards a joint exhibition with world-renowned Thai artist Vasan Sitthiket. So far, she has drawn a blank from arts-funding bodies and public spaces in Melbourne, despite securing the artist’s return airfare from a private benefactor.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diane_Mantzaris Wikipedia

<http://ephemeral-male.blogspot.com/2011/09/another-double-x-and-this-someone-does.html> (blog by collector designer Malcolm Enright)

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Fountain of Eve, Diane Mantzaris © 2011



(Detail) *Fountain of Eve*, Diane Mantzaris © 2011



(Detail) *Fountain of Eve*, Diane Mantzaris © 2011



(Detail) *Fountain of Eve*, Diane Mantzaris © 2011



(Detail), *Fountain of Eve*, Diane Mantzaris © 2011